Power-Gen blog

The International District Energy Association (IDEA) has presented two briefings on district energy on Capitol Hill in Washington DC to inform US congressional leaders on the economic and environmental advantages of district energy systems for cities, communities and campuses.

The briefings were to support progress of the *Thermal Renewable Energy and Efficiency Act* (TREEA), bi-partisan legislation that will, if enacted, support the expanded use of district energy in the US.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum sponsored a briefing for House staff titled: ‘District Energy: America's Best-Kept Secret for Clean, Affordable, Homegrown Energy.'

Meanwhile, the office of Senator Al Franken sponsored a briefing for the Senate entitled: ‘District Energy: How We Can Tap Renewable Thermal and Waste Heat' that was organized by the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI).

More than 30% of all US energy consumption is used for thermal purposes - heating and cooling buildings, and industrial processes - and the majority of this energy comes from fossil fuels, says IDEA. However, some communities are instead using local renewable sources of thermal energy, as well as power plant and industrial waste heat.

District energy systems connect these thermal resources to energy consumers by piping water and/or steam to buildings for space heating, domestic hot water, air conditioning and industrial process energy.

There are district energy systems in all 50 US states, but there are many opportunities to expand existing systems or build new ones. Under-utilization of district energy in the US is not a technology issue, it's a policy issue says IDEA.

TREEA is intended to stimulate investments in low-carbon thermal energy infrastructure, focusing on use of renewable energy sources to supply heating and cooling.

Major provisions include a renewable thermal production tax credit, expanded availability of tax-exempt bonds for district energy infrastructure, and modified authorization for institutional sustainable infrastructure.